

CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

Robarts conference continues to showcase best graduate research in Canadian Studies

In April 2017 the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies hosted its annual graduate student conference. The theme for the conference was “Transgressing the Nation-State: Constructs of Canadian Identity.” The conference was held over two days and was, by all accounts, another successful event (in no small part due to the excellent organizing committee, led by acting director Anna Hudson and York graduate stu-

BY GABRIELLE SLOWEY

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dent Erin Yunes). In July 2015, when I took over as director of the Robarts Centre, I really wanted to bolster the profile and reputation of the Robarts Centre at York (because, let’s be honest, when

most people hear the name Robarts, they still think of the library at U of T). An obvious way to do this was to promote new and cutting-edge graduate research in Canadian studies.

I recall with much fondness my own first conference experience, at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, when two of my best friends sat in the audience and rooted me on as I delivered

Robarts conference, page 31

ORGANIZERS' INTRODUCTION

Transgressing the nation-state: Constructs of Canadian identity

Coinciding with Canada 150, a year-long national celebration of Confederation, in April 2017 the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University hosted its fourth annual graduate student conference, entitled “Transgressing the Nation-State: Constructs of Canadian Identity.” This conference aimed to interrogate the embedded systems of colonialism, racism, sexism, and other social and economic disparities that continue to shape our country.

Over the course of two days, 30 students from universities across the country engaged in critical explorations of inequality in Canadian society. Presenters and attendees participated in

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dynamic conversation that touched on subjects ranging from the difficulties in reconciliation, narratives of erasure, invisibility, and marginalization, to state policy and the trauma of colonization. The panels were further supplemented by an extraordinary keynote lecture,

“Canada at 150: Where Is the ‘Truth’ in the Reconciliation Process?” by Dr. Bonita Lawrence; a virtual reality installation of Lisa Jackson’s “Highway of Tears” (2016), exploring the 1994 disappearance of Ramona Wilson from Highway 16 in northern British Columbia; and a screening of the documentary

Transgressing the nation-state, page 3

The contents of this issue are listed in the Features box on page 2.



feature *Elder in the Making* (2015), which follows Chinese-Canadian filmmaker Chris Hsiung and Blackfoot filmmaker Cowboy Smithx as they travel into southern Alberta's Indigenous territory and history.

We begin this issue with an editorial by Joshua Stribbell, the president of the National Urban Inuit Youth Council, who responds to the question, "Why don't they all move south?" This statement is often directed toward Inuit living in Nunavut, who are struggling with the significant socio-economic issues introduced to the territory through colonialism. Stribbell argues for the need to engage communities directly in the process of demanding accountability from the government of Canada regarding these issues facing Arctic communities. Collaborative action would support community empowerment, as Inuit reclaim their sense of identity and make a stand for their unique cultural needs.

This issue continues with 13 essays developed from presentations given at the 2017 Robarts Annual Graduate Conference. Demonstrating unique insights and rich arguments, these selections are representative of the broader tone of the conference and the interdisciplinary dialogue that took place. Beginning with issues that are rooted in ingrained Canadian prejudices, Maryam Ahmad's "Is Your Name 'Canadian' Enough?," Tyler Chartrand's "Administering Temporary Foreign Worker Status in Canada," and Karl Gardner's "Policing Citizenship: Some Reflections on Immigration Enforcement and Sanctuary in Toronto" all interrogate the subtle markers that enforce cultural isolation and acceptance of immigrants. Who is determined to be "good enough" for citizenship, and how is that policed? Each of the essays in this section explore these questions through a socio-political lens.

Accusations of prejudice are often naturally followed with defensiveness, and even deflective myth building. In "Travelling with Father Morin: Missionaries, Colonial Projects, and the Trans-

As we struggle with the lack of justice for Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine, along with the numerous missing and murdered Indigenous women, there is no better time to reflect on the fact that some Canadians are confined within the constructs of Canadian identity.

national Core of National Debates in Quebec," Fred Burrill looks back in time to explore the anxious nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment of contemporary Québécois society. He does this through a close analysis of the authoritative figure of Father Oscar Morin, a French-Canadian colonial missionary; in the process, Burrill unravels Quebec's implication in, and identification with, global processes of imperialism.

Pushing against the boundaries of the traditional conference paper format, Nedda Baba developed and performed this next piece out of her MFA research/creation practice. Presented here as a kind of concrete poetry, "From Protests to Pomegranates: Exploring Narrative Through Practice-Based Research" attempts to textually re-create the performative elements of Baba's presentation, where she meticulously peeled and seeded a pomegranate. With the drop of each sweet, red jewel into the bowl placed in front of her, the artist interweaves her personal history with broader political movements, in a gesture that explores the transformative potential of performance, object manipulation, and critical discourse.

Linked by an interest in non-normative bodies, the next two essays explore the repercussions of systematic discrimination on people with disabilities. Angie Conrad's "Disability Policy in Canada and New Funding Initiatives: Innovative or Opportunistic?" analyzes the limitations of Canada's disability pol-

icy and the ways in which it affects equity and self-determination for funding recipients. Using literature as a stepping stone, Angela Herring-Lauzon's "Monstrous Bodies, Mad Minds: Reading Trauma Through the Body in Indigenous and Diasporic Contexts" examines representations of madness as they are applied to bodies that have been traumatized by colonization. While the term madness is often used to dismiss agency, Herring-Lauzon's close reading suggests that those same mad bodies can operate as resistance to the legacy of colonial trauma.

Also approaching the legacy of colonial trauma from a creative discipline, Signy Lynch analyzes the performative relationship between audience and theatrical staging in "Direct Audience Address in Cliff Cardinal's *Huff*: Complicity, Powerlessness, and Sovereignty." This essay explores how theatre resists colonialism through the act of "breaking the fourth wall" and challenging the colonial gaze. A similar destabilization takes place in Katherine Morton's "Unsettled Ground: The Ruins of Closed Residential Schools and Canadian Identity," in which she considers the role of residential schools as a monument to, or perhaps an open wound of, the trauma of Canadian colonization practices.

Katie O'Connor's research turns toward ongoing colonial abuses in "Adam Capay: Injustice Toward First Nations Offenders in Canadian Correc-

Robarts conference continued from page 1

my paper. That conference was fairly informal. It was held in Thompson Hall, the graduate centre, but it was a wonderful and positive experience.

With that in mind, I wanted to build up the Robarts graduate conference initiative, launched under my predecessor, to provide a similar opportunity for graduate students to experience their first conference, with an eye to offering students a more professional experience in a supportive and nurturing setting.

To that end, the annual graduate student conference follows the traditional conference format, with a call for papers, a 12-15 minute presentation, and an opportunity to revise and submit for publication, thereby making it as real a conference experience as possible.


At the Robarts Centre we are fortunate to be able to draw on a wide array of faculty associates who also participate in the conference by reading the student papers, providing feedback, and acting

as discussants on the various panels. Having discussants contributes to the professional element of the conference and gives students a real feeling for how conferences function.

Finally, as this edition of *Canada Watch* demonstrates, the final stage is publishing a selection of papers presented at the conference, thereby giving students the final goal of turning a paper into a publication. We are so excited to share with you some of the wonderful work being produced by these amazing graduate students.

As the conference enters its fifth year, we are excited to see more and more students apply to participate as we continue to cultivate a reputation as *the* premier place for graduate research and *the* graduate conference that students want to attend.

We are indebted to the endowment that enables the Centre to finance the conference and to subsidize students

travel costs, thereby increasing the accessibility to students from across the country. We are thankful for the work and engagement of our support staff, faculty, and students who make the conference such a success each year. Overall, as the director of the Robarts Centre, I am pleased to see the way that the graduate conference continues to grow and thrive and remind us that the study of Canada is alive and well. I am particularly proud to see the way the conference provides an important academic, learning, and professional opportunity for so many graduate students. With that in mind, please enjoy yet another stellar edition of *Canada Watch*. 

Transgressing the nation-state continued from page 3

tions.” Relaying the heartbreaking account of Adam Capay, an Indigenous man who was kept in solitary confinement for four years, O’Connor outlines the controversial use of confinement in the Canadian justice system, and its disproportionate use within the systemic mistreatment of First Nations prisoners. Next, Irwin Oostindie also engages the problems of Canada’s policy development as it relates to First Nations peoples. Through direct reference to the celebrations of Canada’s confederacy, his essay “Anniversaries of Denial: Canada 150 and the Impacts of Settler Cultural Policy” interrogates the problematic nature of colonial celebrations as an entrenchment and camouflaging of ongoing applications of policy that erases Indigenous culture.

With these continuing legacies of colonialism, how is reconciliation even remotely possible? In our last two essays,

the authors confront the potentials and pitfalls of such an endeavour. In “Conceptualizing Collaboration Between Indigenous Racialized Immigrants and Aboriginal Peoples,” Brenda Polar describes the alliances that Indigenous peoples worldwide have formed in an attempt to contribute to decolonization. While immigrant populations often experience similar systemic racism, they also contribute to some of the problems of erasure that efface Indigenous culture. Polar addresses this dichotomy and explores the potential collaborations that might ensue. Finally, in “Colonialism vs. Truth and Reconciliation,” Ada Uddoh considers how the legacy of colonialism persists in our legal and governmental systems. In particular, she describes the child welfare system, which has been vigorously criticized for the removal of First Nations children from their parents during the “Sixties

scoop.” As in any other colonial system, change occurs slowly, and despite the renunciation of this policy, First Nations peoples are still overrepresented in foster care. Where does such a broken system go from here? Uddoh outlines a few of the proposed changes to the Manitoba welfare system that seek to take steps toward reconciliation.

Together, these essays conclude that the Canadian legacy is deeply entrenched by social and economic inequalities along lines of gender, race, indigeneity, ability, region, socio-economic status, and migration status, among others. As we struggle with the lack of justice for Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine, along with the numerous missing and murdered Indigenous women, there is no better time to reflect on the fact that some Canadians are confined within the constructs of Canadian identity. 